

Raising children in the West

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We can talk about the conservative East and the parenting styles that parents over there adopt. Or we can talk about parenting in the West, and the prevalent approaches to raising children in the West.

Of course there are different styles to parenting, ranging from authoritarian to permissive, and there are all sorts of methods that are recommended to nurture, guide and discipline children. Never mind the culture or approach, parenting is a tough job, no matter how you look at it.

But amidst the challenges of parenting, the responsibility falls heavily upon Muslim parents to raise children as the best of Muslims, no matter where they are staying and no matter which parenting style suits them best. Muslims staying in the West or in Muslim-minority countries will often face challenges through the environment.

The media and entertainment, peer pressure and some social norms in the West – like alcohol and music – often pose challenges for Muslim families. And though it may appear safer or easier to raise children in Muslim-majority countries, with satellite television and the internet becoming a cultural norm, the challenges of raising children in Muslim-majority countries are also becoming more apparent.

Wherever we are located, there are always a few basic reminders that can help parents preserve the sanctity of the family, which will allow children to flourish amidst adversities.

Create a Happy Home

Children who are happy are easier to understand, are easier to speak to, and are more open in communicating their needs and wants. Happy children are also more open to sharing, feel safe and secure, and will always

come back to the people who love them the most – their parents. Raising happy children is important, and through this, parents need to create a home that is brimming with happiness.

Loving children unconditionally is the first step to take. Children who feel loved will return the compassion they receive and will ultimately feel happy. Showing love can be done through plenty of hugs, quiet time with undivided attention, indulging in activities of mutual interest, encouraging strengths, and providing guidance and discipline, as and when necessary.

Of course, all this has to be done with Allah Almighty in mind. Muslim parents should always keep in mind that every action they take is for the sake of Allah, and for their desire to raise a Muslim who is beneficial to mankind wherever they live.

A happy home always has involved parents. Both parents need to be actively involved in raising children. Some families choose to home-school their children, extending their parental duties to include providing a wholesome education for their children. This too is an excellent way for parents and their children to get to know each other better and to help work together, creating cohesiveness in the family.

Reading and Relaying the Stories of the Quran

A home without the knowledge of the Quran is a home of hopelessness and misguidance. Reading and studying the Quran, no matter how little, will help guide and nurture children.

Even for parents who are not well versed in reading the Quran, they should teach whatever little they know to their children, for there are blessings in those who even struggle with reading the Holy Scriptures on their own.

This doesn't mean that parents should stop there. Families need to continuously want to study and understand the message of the Quran, and there are plenty of ways to do so, including online courses and outsourcing to those who know little more.

Having children brought up by the Quran will help them to grow and flourish as Muslims, no matter where they are and no matter where they go. Plenty of parents aspire to raise their children as hafiths (Muslims who learn Quran by heart), which encourages them to commit the entire Quran to heart. Imagine having your children set out in the world with the entire Quran in their hearts. God-willing, they will always stay on the right path.

Listen to your Children

Speaking and listening to children is the key to communication. Children need to be heard and understood to feel secure. When children know that their parents will listen to them without being judgmental, they will feel safe to open up when they have problems, to ask questions when they are in doubt, and to come “home” when they are dealing with difficulties.

Many families lose contact with their children because they stop communicating with them. Many parents speak to their children, but forget to listen, leaving their children to their own devices and forcing them to make their own decisions when they need guidance.

When they are in trouble, the same children tend to look for help outside their home, which may mean going down the wrong path. This turns into a vicious cycle where children grow further and further away from their parents, causing even more gaps in the family unit.

Listening to children is also a reality check for their parents, as children are a mirror to their parents’ behavior. Celebrating achievements together, learning something new together, discussing the Seerah (Biography of the Prophet) before bedtime, resolving disputes together are all part and parcel of becoming a family.

Children who feel safe and secure to express themselves will also feel confident in the outside world. They will be able to make better decisions for themselves, stand up against wrong-doings, and will also be able to express themselves effectively, as and when they need to.

Find Good Company

Having good friends is equally important as building a strong family unit – this is both true for parents and children. Finding like-minded parents helps children strengthen their faith, as well as their identity as Muslims.

It is easier to raise children if they see friends being raised in the same way and whom they can relate to. Finding good company can also help differentiate what is permissible from what is not. It will help children understand that though there are those who drink alcohol or patron night clubs, it is not necessarily a good thing to do and there are alternatives to having fun with good friends.

No Muslim is an island and no child should live as a hermit. Instead, children should be exposed to all walks of life, as long as they are of good company, and this will help them engage in good deeds and ward off evil ones.

Supplications to Allah

Lastly, parents have to use their most important parenting tool: supplications. Supplications or duaas are the hotlines for guidance at all times. Supplications of parents are very powerful, so it is important to ask Allah for help to raise and to guide children.

Praying to Allah in full sincerity will keep all of us on the right path. Allah says what means {Call on Me; I will answer your prayer.} (Ghaffir 40:60) In another chapter He says what means, {And when My servants question you concerning Me, I am near; I answer the call of the caller when he calls to Me; so let them respond to Me, and let them believe in Me that they might go aright.} (Al-Baqarah 2:186) What better way for parents to find strength in guiding their children, when they can ask Allah for His Mercy.

Allah's Mercy transcends all boundaries, through different cultures, through different parenting styles, through to different geographical locations and through different challenges in raising children. At the end of the day, Allah reigns supreme, and it is important to trust in Allah first, to help strengthen the belief of tawheed (Oneness of Allah) in our children.

It may be challenging to raise children as the world gets more and more indebted with temptations, but following and trusting Allah will help nurture Allah-centric children, who will always want to stay on the straight path.